



ERA+ Clinical Leadership in Nursing Education



Clinical Leadership in Nursing Education Inspirational good practice

“Dedicated education unit”

This example shows practical leadership skills that are applied in educational settings. These practices were identified and collected during the Erasmus+ KA220-HED project “Clinical Leadership in Nursing Education,” co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The content is based on existing practices, with good examples submitted by project partners and stakeholders, recognized as validated examples from professional practice.

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Content

1.	Contact Information.....	3
2.	Short description of the teaching method	3
3.	Why should colleagues use this method to strengthen clinical leadership?.....	3
4.	Competencies related to clinical leadership.....	3
5.	Timeline	4
6.	Student guidance.....	5
7.	Required materials / Conditions	5
8.	Evaluation / Follow-up.....	5
9.	Results / effects on students	5
10.	Tips for colleagues	6
11.	Practical example / anecdote (optional).....	6
12.	Visual material (optional)	6

1. Contact Information

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2. Short description of the teaching method

A Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) is a clinical learning model in which nursing students complete their clinical placements as a team rather than as individually supervised learners. Students take primary responsibility for their own learning, engage in peer learning, and provide patient care as independently as their competence allows, while working within the multidisciplinary healthcare team. The model is designed to create an authentic clinical environment where learning is embedded in everyday patient care. In practice, a DEU is organised so that a group of students takes responsibility for the care of a designated patient group in the unit, working collaboratively, learning from one another, and gradually increasing their level of independence. A dedicated nurse supervisor supports the student team, ensures patient safety, and provides guidance when needed, rather than directing all activities. The educational foundation of the DEU is transformative learning, which encourages critical thinking, reflection, problem-solving, and professional growth.

3. Why should colleagues use this method to strengthen clinical leadership?

Students learn to integrate theoretical knowledge with clinical practice by taking responsibility for planning and delivering care. The model has been shown to strengthen students' autonomy, clinical decision-making, and understanding of holistic patient care. In addition, DEUs can expand clinical placement capacity while fostering close collaboration between healthcare organizations and educational institutions.

4. Competencies related to clinical leadership

Primary competences – **secondary competences** addressed by this good practice

Domain – ethics

- ☐ Ethical competence (**ethical principles and values; professional integrity and accountability**)

Domain – professional nursing

- ☐ Clinical competence (**clinical competence in specific clinical area; nursing process; health promotion**)
- ☐ Quality management competence (**quality of care; patient safety**)
- ☐ Evidence based practice competence (**evidence based practice**)
- ☐ Decision making competence (**critical thinking; decision making; problem solving**)
- ☐ Self-development competence (**continuous professional development**)

Domain – innovation and change

- ☐ Visioning competence (**future-oriented thinking; understanding the big picture; finding innovative approaches; questioning**)
- ☐ Change management competence (**initiating change; advocating change; implementing change**)

Domain – influencing and advocacy

- ☐ Influencing competence (**influencing others; motivating others**)
- ☐ Patient advocacy competence (**patient advocacy**)

Domain – team leadership

Team leadership competence (**team formation, team coordination, positive working atmosphere**)

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- ☐ Guidance competence (**supervision, mentoring**)

Domain – communication and collaboration

- ☐ Communication competence (**effective communication, dialogical competence**)
- ☐ Collaboration competence (**interprofessional collaboration; professional collaboration**)

5. Timeline

The duration is determined by the length of the clinical placement period. In the Finnish context, clinical placements in a Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) typically last between 4 and 10 weeks.

6. Student guidance

The teacher supervising the clinical placement keeps in contact with the students and the registered nurses who guide them. The students prepare individual learning objectives for the clinical placement, which the teacher comments on. The student, the supervising registered nurse and the teacher usually hold feedback and assessment discussions midway through and at the end of the placement. In the DEU model, students are also encouraged to give feedback to one another. More experienced students are also encouraged to guide students at earlier stages of their studies within the limits of their own competence, if students at different stages of their studies are completing their clinical placement at the same time.

7. Required materials / Conditions

It is important to agree on the practical arrangements of the DEU with the unit. Students should receive sufficient advance information about the DEU, especially if they have not previously completed a similar clinical placement.

8. Evaluation / Follow-up

Learning is assessed through a tripartite discussion between the student, the teacher and the supervising registered nurse. The student's learning objectives provide the basis for the assessment.

9. Results / effects on students

The DEU model enhances students' autonomy, responsibility, clinical decision-making, and professional growth. Through peer learning, reflective practice, and authentic participation in patient care, students develop stronger critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of holistic, patient-centred nursing care. The DEU model also develops students' team working skills.

10. Tips for colleagues

Implementing a DEU requires commitment from healthcare organisations, as they are responsible for organising it. The teacher can act as an innovator and encourage organisations to launch DEU-based clinical placements. The teacher can also highlight the benefits of the DEU model based on evidence. The teacher's pedagogical expertise is important support for the registered nurses who supervise students in the DEU. Careful orientation of students to the DEU model is very important.

11. Practical example / anecdote (optional)

Students have described that, in traditional clinical placements, they sometimes feel that they are simply following the supervising registered nurse and carrying out individual procedures without gaining an overall understanding of the patient's care. The DEU model, in contrast, "forces" them to consider the patient's care as a whole and to plan it themselves. In the DEU model, many students may already begin to demonstrate characteristics of clinical leaders, for example by motivating others through their own actions and maintaining a positive atmosphere for working and learning. Patients are generally very satisfied with DEU students.

12. Visual material (optional)

N/A